

## Despair and Hope--Chapter Four

by Kari

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By Kari Raines @ [JadedAmida@aol.com](mailto:JadedAmida@aol.com)

Despair and Hope homepage:

<http://members.xoom.com/JadeSabre/despair.html>

Disclaimer is in the Prologue.

He kissed her feverishly, yet gently at the same time, consuming her with his passion. His lips were taking in the sweet taste of her, savoring every delicious portion of her exquisite skin. "Jack," she whispered throatily, throwing her head back as his searching lips made contact with the warm, soft skin of her throat. "Rose, you're incredible," he breathed, voice muffled by the tender skin of her neck. "Did you expect anything less of a first class girl?" she teased through the heat of her consuming fire.

He stopped his exploration of her body to meet her green eyes with his blue ones. "From any other first class girl? I'd expect coldness. Not you, Rose," he whispered, a small smile forming on his lips. "Not you." With that, he focused his gaze on her full lips, bringing his own down to taste hers caressingly. "Rose," he moaned as her hands began an exploration of their own down his chest. His kisses became more heated as her hands found their way even lower . . .

"Jack!" Rose gasped, body abruptly jerking. She glanced around frantically, eyes taking in the interior of the train she was traveling in. A dream. It had been a dream. \*Calm down, Rose,\* she told herself, noticing the strange looks she was receiving from the

other coach passengers. Sitting back in her seat, she took a deep breath, forcing her breathing to calm.

Hands trembling, she took a handkerchief out of her purse, wiping off the beads of sweat that had formed on her brow. She knew that her cheeks were flushed. She squirmed in her seat, trying not to think about the dream. It had been so vivid.

When that failed, she reached inside her purse for a stationery and pen. She needed to do something to keep her mind off of Jack. Besides, she'd never thanked her rescuers who had pulled her out of the water. Taking a deep breath, she began her first letter:

Dear Mr. Lowe,

I am writing this letter to thank you sincerely for pulling me out of the water on that dreadful

night. I did not get a chance to thank you properly,

for I was in such a state of shock. I think you

should know that I am doing quite well now,

thanks to the efforts of you and those other

kind gentlemen. Again, I thank you. If it had not

been for your generosity, I would surely be

dead now.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Rose Dawson

That done, she read the letter over silently. Satisfied, she tucked it away. They were arriving in Chippewa Falls. She watched the green countryside, eager to etch it all in her memory. This place was, after all, a part of Jack.

It was very beautiful. They had passed many shimmering, blue lakes, but they had yet to pass the one she intended to visit before any others--Lake Wissota. The woods--look how green in the early summer rays. Had she ever laid eyes on such natural beauty? For the hundredth time since the sinking, she cursed her first class upbringing. To never have the opportunity to study nature upfront was a sin to Mother Nature herself. She sighed, losing her train of thought as they arrived at the station of the small town called Chippewa Falls. She placed her hand on her belly. \*Here we are, Jacklynn. This is your father's hometown.\*

Rose gasped in surprise when she felt an invisible hand softly touch her cheek. In her heart, she thought she could feel Jack say, \*I'm with you, too, Rose. We'll show our daughter together.\*

Rose smiled. Yes. Jack had come home after all.

\* \* \*

She strolled down the wooded trail, the sunlight drifting through the shadows of the trees, casting a red-gold halo about her head. According to the man at the train station, the lonely trail led to a nearby grocery shop. Rose was glad to have this time to walk alone and wonder if Jack had walked down this same path to this same grocer. It seemed plausible. It was, after all, a small town.

Being early summer, the trees were still crowned in all their glory with their bright, green leaves. Rose smiled, breathing in the sweet, summer air. It was tinged with the scent of flowers mingled with the fresh aroma of wood. Rose found it exhilarating. She never thought she would feel this way again.

A gentle breeze drifted down the trail, cooling the sweat beginning to form on her skin, and stirring the loose strands of her soft hair. "I feel alive," she whispered aloud. It felt so good to say it. "Thank you, Jack. Thank you for saving me."

As she strolled, gazing at the freshly blooming flowers, she wondered what her life would be like if she had not met Jack. A frown creased her brow at the thought. She would undoubtedly be married to Cal right now, living in one of his stuffy mansions and watching her intolerable etiquette. The thought left a bad taste in her mouth. Best think of something else.

She went back to Jack. If she concentrated enough, she could almost see him walking beside her. Her Jack, dressed as he had on the Titanic, in his dark trousers and simple, practical white shirt. \*He smiles at her slyly, then stops to pick a lavender flower, bowing elegantly as he places it in her outstretched hand. 'For you, my dear,' he says in his mock snobbery that she finds so amusing, waving his hand in presentation\*.

'For me? Why, thank you, dear.'\* She grinned at the thought of accepting Jack's sincere gift. She allowed her mind to drift to another time, another possibility. \*Jack is with her again, but this time, their little daughter Jacklynn is there, too, clutching tightly to the hand of both her parents. She has the red curls of her mother--something Jack is pleased about--but the piercing blue eyes of her father--something Rose is pleased about. Jack picks their little girl up and swings her over his shoulders in a typical fatherly fashion. Jackie just giggles as if it were the height of hilarity.

Rose watches her husband and daughter, smiling and shaking her head. 'You two,' she says with a laugh. When Jack sets the child down, she runs ahead of her parents, squealing in childish delight, the white ruffles of her dress trailing behind her tiny figure. 'Don't go too far,' Rose calls to her fleeing daughter. Jack smiles at his wife's concern, placing his hand on hers in reassurance. 'Let her have fun. She'll be all right.'

Rose nods slightly before taking Jack's hand. He always had a way of putting her fears at ease. They walk in silence for a while, watching their daughter as she stops to pick a bouquet, humming softly. This is the way things are supposed to be.\*

Rose stopped suddenly. The air had gone eerily still. She could no longer hear the soothing sounds of Mother Nature. Jack was not beside her, she realized with a sudden sadness that dimmed the euphoria she

had experienced mere moments before. Jack would never be able to swing his daughter over his shoulders. His little girl would never know how wonderful her father really was.

She stopped in her tracks. Jack was at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. The thought struck her, threatening to send her into a fresh bout of tears. \*No. Don't cry. Not anymore. Jack's with us.\* She resumed her walking, attempting to gain some amount of the tranquility she had experienced moments before. She rubbed her belly. "Don't worry, Jacklynn. Mommy's just upset. I'll be all right." She said this with more conviction than she actually felt, but for her own sake and the sake of her child, she kept going. Her daughter would know how extraordinary her father was. Rose was determined to make it so. It was a beautiful day and she would not let grief ruin it.

\* \* \*

Rose found the small grocery store to be just as charming as the town itself. It was an old cottage, but kept neat and clean. Her mother would have found it to be hideous. It was lacking in all the fancy elegance so accustomed by the rich that the upper class would have found it to be disgusting. Rose thought it was beautiful. Simple, practical, but charming in its own right.

She entered the store and proceeded to pick out the things she needed for her luncheon. She politely smiled at the curious people who were unused to strangers in their small town. Rose smiled politely, as was expected of her, but could not hide her obvious discomfort. After quietly selecting her bread and fresh ham, she made her way to the check-out counter. The petite old woman smiled at her. "Will that be all for you, dearie?"

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you."

"You're not from around here, are ya?" the old lady asked as she added up Rose's total.

Rose was somewhat surprised by her abruptness. "No, ma'am. I'm from Philadelphia, actually," she answered, handing the woman the appropriate amount of money and offering no further explanation.

"So what brings you to Chippewa Falls?"

Rose shifted uncomfortably. She did not like this woman's curious questioning, but perhaps she could use this opportunity to find out about Jack's family.

"My husband is from around here. He . . . um . . . passed away a couple of weeks ago." Rose's eyes glanced down at her boots as she mentioned Jack's death. She did not want this strange woman to see the pain in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, honey," the woman said sympathetically, sensing the deep pain that Rose had uselessly attempted to hide.

Rose knew that the woman meant well, but she could not help the flare of anger that rose up in her cheeks. She did not want sympathy from this stranger. "It's quite all right," Rose told her, keeping her

anger in check. "I wanted to know more about his family. Maybe you could help me out. His name is--was Jack Dawson."

The old woman's eyes widened in surprise. "That youngest Dawson boy? Why--we haven't seen him in years. Fled after his parents died and haven't come back since. You said you're his wife? And he's dead?"

Rose nodded sadly.

"It's a shame," the lady continued. "He was a mischievous little thing, but he had a good heart. Cute, too. And that boy could draw. We all thought he'd become rich and famous someday and be too good for us." She sighed. "Whole town'll mourn for that boy."

"Well," she grinned at Rose, reaching across the counter to pat her shoulder, "any wife of that nice Dawson boy is welcome here." She gave Rose her friendliest wink.

Rose flinched when the woman patted her shoulder. She was unused to such inappropriate displays of familiarity. Her mother would have had a heart attack. She smiled at the thought. \*Get used to it, Rose. You're not a society girl anymore.\* "Could you tell me where the Dawson home is?" Rose asked.

"Sure could." She was more than happy to oblige. "It's just his little sister living there now. She's about your age, you know. You two will be great together."

Rose thought her heart would pound right out of her chest at this revelation. A sister! Jack had a sister. In the short time that they had known each other, Jack had said little about his family. Because of the deep pain Rose could see in his face when the subject had come up, she had not pressured him to talk about them. They had thought that they had their whole lives together.

But now she had an opportunity to learn about Jack's childhood--something that she would never be able to share with him, but still, it was a part of him that was closed to her that would now be opened. After obtaining the directions to the Dawson home, Rose rushed out in a hurry, her lunch almost completely forgotten. Lilly. The old lady said that her name was Lilly. "Here we go, Jackie," Rose whispered toward her stomach; toward the barely perceptible presence that existed there. "Let's go meet your Aunt Lilly."

Finding the right house was not a difficult feat. Everyone she met was eager to show her the way. Apparently, the Dawsons were a much loved family. If they were anything at all like Jack, it was not difficult to see why.

She stood on the front steps of the small cottage. It was only slightly larger than the grocery had been, but ten times more charming. It reminded Rose of something out of a fairy tale. It was beautiful, set against the green, early summer trees. She could imagine the way it must look in the autumn, surrounded by beautiful shades of red and orange and yellow. It was no wonder that Jack had wanted to be an artist, growing up in a place like this. It was beauty in its purest form with nature--so unlike the manmade beauty of the upper society. All that elegance was so fake compared to this. This was true beauty, and the fact that Jack had once lived here made

it all the more beautiful.

Tears tinged her eyes as she gazed up at this small, wonderful cottage. She could imagine Jack as a child, running in and out of this very doorway that she now stood in.

She took a deep breath, wiping the fresh tears from her eyes in an effort to compose herself. The sound of her heart beating against her rib cage was almost deafening as she raised her trembling hand up to the door. She knocked gently, anticipating what exactly she would say to Jack's sister. What if she didn't believe her? She paced nervously, tapping on the door again.

When the door finally opened and a young woman appeared, Rose's mouth dropped open in slight shock. She was looking into Jack's eyes.

"May I help you?" the girl asked politely, curiosity evident in her eyes.

"Yes," Rose responded, "I . . . um . . . well, you see . . . "

Rose stopped, scolding herself for her embarrassing lack of coherency. She took a deep breath, starting over. "Yes, forgive me. Are you Miss Lilly Dawson?"

The questioning look in the girl's eyes became even more curious. "Yes, I am she. Who are you, might I ask?"

Rose studied this young woman for a short moment. As the strange woman at the grocer had said, Lilly was about her own age. She had the same blonde hair as Jack, tied back in a single braid. She was lovely, with features very similar to Jack's, and she wore a simple but pretty blue dress.

Best to be up front with her, Rose decided.

"My name is Rose. " She stopped, preparing herself. "Rose Dawson."

Rose studied the girl's expression as she waited for it to sink in. Before Lilly could question her, she continued. "You see, your brother Jack, well . . . he was my husband." Well, not entirely true, but close enough.

She could see surprise on the young woman's face, followed by a slight frown. "What do you mean 'was'?" she asked slowly, eyes begging for an answer that Rose was not sure she was ready to give.

Rose studied her serenely. She had not meant to tell her like this. "Please, Miss Dawson, may I come in?"

"Of course," Lilly gasped, remembering her manners. "I'm terribly sorry. And please, call me Lilly."

Rose gazed at this woman, mind flashing back to her first real conversation with Jack. She had repeatedly called him 'Mr. Dawson' until he began to insist she call him simply 'Jack'. She had just met Lilly, but was already seeing similarities in their behavior.

Lilly led her into the cozy living room. It was completely as charming as the outside had been, and very homey. Jack must have loved it here. What Rose would have given to be able to grow up in such a charming house with a loving family. Having a rich family meant many things, but 'loving' was not one of them. It was ironic that she was envious of the people that her mother and Cal had so despised.

She could see photographs on the stone mantel of the old fireplace. Head light, she made her way to the fireplace to gain a closer look at the pictures. The pictures portrayed a happy family. There was one in particular taken in this very room. There was Jack's father and mother, smiling and holding hands. Sitting in front of them were three small, but mischevious-looking children. There was Lilly, sitting between her two brothers. And look!--it was unmistakably Jack sitting on her right. She laughed slightly. He looked just the same! Well, younger, of course, but the same, nevertheless. On Lilly's left was another brother--obviously a few years older than the other siblings, his arm wrapped protectively around his little sister. Rose made a mental note to ask Lilly about the other brother at a more opportune time.

Next, Rose studied Jack's parents. Looking at his mother, it was obvious where the Dawson children had gotten their blonde hair from. Lilly resembled her very closely, Rose could not help but notice. And Jack's father--the resemblance to Jack was uncanny! Rose had no doubt that if Jack had lived past the young age of twenty, he would have become a mirror image of his father. Rose grinned, bringing her attention to the other pictures. They all portrayed a happy family, doing happy things. Once again, Rose found herself envious. She vowed silently that this was the kind of life she would give to her daughter.

Lilly watched this young woman who claimed to be Jack's wife. She was beautiful, and seemed kind. She looked like a woman of third class, yet, there was something more. She had an air about her that suggested a woman of a higher class, but Lilly couldn't quite figure it out. However, she felt as though she could trust this young woman. There was a genuine sincerity to the way she studied their family pictures. She seemed to want to grasp every aspect of Jack's life that she possibly could hold onto. Somehow, it seemed as if she were meant to trust this girl; as if something were telling her to. So Lilly waited patiently for this woman--this Rose Dawson--to finish looking at the photos.

Finally, Rose turned to face her. Lilly thought she could glimpse a hint of tears glinting in the corners of her eyes. And the deep pain she could see haunting Rose's young eyes was both scary and touching all at once. This was about Jack. She knew suddenly; she knew it with all her heart. Something horrible had happened to her brother.

"Such a beautiful family," Lilly could hear Rose murmur, but somehow, it did not register. She had to know now.

"What happened?" she asked abruptly, ignoring Rose's tearful comment.

Rose merely stared at her, eyes dull, with a hint of resignation,

pity, and sympathy. No. This made the anticipation all the more unbearable. "Please tell me," she begged, becoming more insistent with her desperate need to know that her brother was okay.

"I'm so sorry to be the one to tell you this . . . " Rose began hesitantly, but was unexpectedly interrupted by Lilly's desperate plea.

"Please, just say it!"

"Fine!" Rose shouted, forgetting her sympathy in a quick flash of anger. "Jack is dead, Lilly. He's dead. Dead!"

Lilly went completely still. Rose watched the girl's cheeks turn from a lovely shade of pink to marble white as the blood was completely drained from her face. Immediately, Rose regretted having told her in such an insensitive manner. She could see Lilly's lips moving in an effort to form words, but no sound was coming forth. "How?" she managed to croak out.

Putting her own feelings of pain on hold, Rose wrapped her arms around the other girl's shoulders and led her to the old, worn-out couch. "I'm so sorry," Rose whispered, apologizing for both the horrible news and for the manner in which she had delivered it. "You heard about the Titanic?"

Lilly nodded mechanically. Of course she had heard about the Titanic. Everyone not living in a cave at the opposite end of the Earth had heard about the Titanic. They were calling it the "waking up of mankind to their own mortality."

Rose took a deep breath, shutting her eyes tight. It was too soon to relive this memory--this pain. It was still an open wound, threatening to bleed with renewed strength. Beneath her eyelids, she could see Jack's smiling face. He was encouraging her now in the way that only Jack knew how.

"We were on that ship together," Rose told her with renewed strength. "Jack gave his life to save me. He died honorably."

Lilly, opened her mouth to speak, trying to find words to form her next question. "Did you . . . ?"

"Love him? Yes. Very much. I love him still; that will never change. And he loved me as well."

Lilly was quiet as she waited for Rose to gather her thoughts. "I would have happily died with him," Rose continued, "but he made me promise to survive. So," she said with a shrug of finality, "here I am."

Rose was silent for a moment as she contemplated telling Lilly of her pregnancy. It was too soon. Lilly would think her a madwoman.

As she spoke, Rose could see the fresh pain registering on the other girl's face, and the first hint of tears. So much like Jack. So looked so much like him. Lilly's pain touched her. To see tears in those eyes that were so much like Jack's was more than she could bear. Throwing reserve to the wind, Rose threw her arms around Lilly, and together, they cried. Time became nonexistent as they lost



themselves in their grief, tears pouring forth from their broken hearts. Their tears were shed for the loss of someone who had meant the world to both of them; someone dear to their hearts whom could never be replaced. Perhaps they even shed tears for all those other lost people who went down with the doomed ship, and everyone who had suffered any kind of pain equal to their own.

"He always was honorable," Lilly finally said with a small laugh, wiping the tears from her reddened eyes.

Rose giggled slightly as she realized that she had expected nothing less of Jack. "I want to know everything, " she told Lilly, her voice suddenly solemn.

Lilly smiled, laying her hand on top of Rose's. "There's so much. Jack and John were both very protective older brothers. It was cute, but sometimes embarrassing . . . "

With those words, a silent bond of friendship was formed between them, and in her heart, Rose found herself thanking Jack once again.

Continued in Chapter Five.

End  
file.